Boundary management of employees' non-work lives: Effects on South African workers' commitment

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Abstract

Employees' lives are holistic, and are comprised of many roles, resulting in complex interactions between their work and non-work lives. Broadly speaking, organisational responses to this could include ignoring employees' non-work lives (separation), active involvement (integration), or creating flexibility and tolerance, thereby enabling employees to manage conflict (respect). This study investigates whether such response types impact differently on employee commitment. The findings suggest that a separation response decreases affective commitment, moderated by greater non-work involvement or role conflict. A respect response increases affective commitment, moderated by high non-work involvement, role conflict, "hindrance" coping or lower career commitment. Continuance and normative commitment were not affected. These findings suggest that managers might take a role in employees' non-work lives by creating flexibility and tolerance at work. However, managers should probably avoid implementing paternalistic approaches that attempt active involvement.

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1
Introduction

There is increasing interest in the lives of employees outside of work for various reasons ranging from the impact on work attitudes and behaviours (e.g. Edwards & Rothbard, 2000) to ethical implications for firms (Payne & Wayland, 1999).

From the organisational perspective, effective responses to employees' non-work lives could bring valuable gains in the form of key outcomes (Kirchmeyer, 1995). However, what makes a response effective is debatable, because employees probably want varying types and levels of intervention, if any (Rothbard, Phillips & Dumas, 2005). There is the further dangerous possibility that a firm could adopt an invasive and controlling role, violating tenets of libertarian ethics that may constitute social norms (e.g. Payne & Wayland, 1999).

This article investigates whether different organisational responses to non-work involve-ment affect employee commitment. Relevant theory is assessed below, and an empirical study investigating the above link reported.

2
The interface between non-work and work domains

There are various possible links between non-work and work domains, along with equally diverse organisational responses. In this section, the taxonomies of the non-work–work interface and organisational responses as well as some potential moderators will be briefly discussed.

2.1 The relationship between work and non-work domains

Edwards and Rothbard (2000) provide the following summary taxonomy of theories encompassing work–non-work interactions:

- *Spillover*: Where attitudes or behaviours from one domain generalise "ripplelike"

to others (Near *et al*, 1980: 416). Edwards and Rothbard (2000: 180) suggest that this may occur because of similar constructs in the two domains, or where "experiences are transferred intact between domains". Spillover could be either negative, as in transfer of fatigue, or positive, as in satisfaction transfer (e.g. Bakker & Geurts, 2004; Demerouti *et al*, 2005):

- *Compensation*: When there is an inverse association between work and non-work effects, individuals may, for example, compensate for need-fulfilment deficiencies at work through choices of leisure and family activities (Staines, 1980). Supplemental compensation involves seeking positive rewards in one domain that are absent from another, while reactive compensation, that is, unpleasant experiences in one domain, drives an individual to seek the opposite in another domain (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000: 181);

- *Segmentation*: Work and family are kept conceptually and effectively separate from each other by individuals or firms;

- *Resource drain*: "Transfer of finite personal resources, such as time, attention, and energy, from one domain to another" (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000: 181). This differs from compensation as it is passive and involves only resources, not domain salience or rewards. Demerouti *et al* (2004) show that this can lead to spiralling negative interactions between work and non-work roles (see also Bakker, Demerouti & Dollard, 2008; Demerouti *et al*, 2005, for cross-spousal resource drain effects);

- *Congruence*: Apparent similarities between domains might exist, but only because an exogenous variable is acting on both domains in like measure and way, without actual inter-domain interaction. For instance, optimism may lead to satisfaction in all domains;

- *Work-family conflict*. Conflict refers to situations in which the demands or role requirements of multiple domains stand in opposition to one another so that one cannot be effectively achieved if others also require attention.

More recently, much attention has been focused on *enrichment* as opposed to *depletion* theories on multiple domains (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Rothbard, 2001). Depletion refers to negative theories on resource drain and conflict, and suggests conflict between the use of finite resources and its negative consequences. Enrichment or facilitation conversely suggests that positive consequences and interactions between multiple roles may occur, ranging from the expansion of resources, or the buffering of negative effects in one role by others, similar to the good in compensation and positive spill-over (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

The consequences of multiple roles may therefore vary. Negative spillover and conflict have been widely studied, and have been found to have negative consequences like absenteeism, lower productivity, health issues and lateness (e.g. Frone, Russel & Cooper, 1992; Hammer, Bauer & Grandey, 2003). The possibility of positive enrichment has also become clearer with empirical research (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006, for a review; Poppleton *et al*, 2008, for recent in-depth qualitative results).

Much of the impact of multiple roles will be determined at the individual level by means of constructs like disposition. However, from the managerial perspective, the organisation's responses to employees' non-work lives may also have an impact. The following section discusses the possibility of organisational responses and some of their types.

2.2 Organisational responses to employees' non-work lives

A great deal of research into organisational responses now makes use of boundary theory as an organising framework (Desrochers & Sargent, 2004; Hall & Richter, 1988; Rothbard, Phillips & Dumas, 2005). *Boundary flexibility* refers to the extent to which the boundary between work and non-work roles can be moved in terms of considerations like time and location. Flexible work scheduling is therefore generally seen as flexibility.

Boundary permeability refers to the extent to which psychological or behavioural elements of one domain enter others (Hall & Richter,

1988). Employers' responses to employees' non-work lives fall broadly into these possibilities. Employers might facilitate multiple domain management by making the physical demarcations of work flexible enough to meet individual needs, or by integrating non-work and work roles and activities to reduce conflict and separation (Kirchmeyer, 1995).

Generally, the extent to which the firm crosses boundaries is seen to exist on a continuum ranging from separation (no crossing) to integration (extreme crossing) or, more generally, in-between. A classic triune typology for the response of a firm along these lines is as follows (Kanter, 1977; Kirchmeyer, 1995):

1. *Separation*: based on the assumption that work and non-work domains are entirely separate. In the context of the organisation's response, separation entails high boundary inflexibility and impermeability, with the implicit assumption that employees' non-work lives do not exist vis-à-vis work and productivity (Kirchmeyer, 1995);

2. *Integration* entails treating work and non-work as related worlds, and acting to reduce the gap between them in an effort to help employees manage their multiple domains. Integration may involve flexibility and permeability of boundaries, but in this taxonomy would tend towards at least some of the latter. Employers might adopt integration-type initiatives from a depletion mindset (Kirchmeyer, 1992), believing that they must help employees reduce their non-work activities and responsibilities. Counselling services, childcare, financial planning and medical facilities are examples (Crouter, 1984). Integration may be seen as employers "taking control" and perhaps adopting a paternalistic approach to the employment relationship (Kirchmeyer, 1995);

3. *Respect* entails organisational responses between separation and integration, in which the firm commits where necessary to supporting rather than controlling employees' non-work roles as desired by employees (Kanter, 1977; Kirchmeyer, 1995). Many, if not most employees still

prefer to manage their own external lives (Kirchmeyer, 1992; Hall & Richter, 1988; Rothbard *et al*, 2005). Hall and Richter (1988) argue that employers should respect employees' outside lives, and provide them with the time and resources to allow them to fulfil outside roles themselves rather than trying to take them over. Support involves providing employees with the personal resources to fulfil non-work responsibilities, generally by creating boundary flexibility rather than permeability. Employers who assume that participation in non-work domains acts as a positive force may perceive their role as enhancing synergies, for example by supporting employee family needs in order to mitigate cross-role stress (Kirchmeyer, 1992).

3
Organisational responses and employee commitment

The organisational commitment of employees has long been of interest to organisational researchers. Allen and Meyer's (1990) well known three-dimensional operationalisation of commitment will be used as the dependent variables, as shown below.

The Allan and Meyer (1990) framework is an attitudinal approach to commitment, focusing on people's feelings about and attachment to facets of their organisational life. A behavioural or motivational approach to commitment, on the other hand, focuses on the actual actions denoting commitment. The motivational approach is generally a more instrumental one, focusing on commitment as a "cognitive predisposition towards a particular focus, insofar as this focus has the potential to satisfy needs, realise values and achieve goals" (Roodt, 2004: 85; Cohen, 2007; Kanungo, 1982a). The attitudinal approach has been chosen because of its suitability for the question at hand:

*   It is theoretically more proximal to important organisational outcomes than the motivational approach (Roodt, 2007);

*   It can be broadly generalised to the cross-over with non-work issues (whereas

the behavioural approach does not have adequate measurement for appropriate actions options in this context);

- It is the most proven and dominant of the approaches;

- It has the strongest proven links to important organisational outcomes (Meyer & Topolnytsky, 2000).

3.1 Affective commitment

Affective commitment involves an "emotional or affective attachment to the organisation" (Allen & Meyer, 1990:2), in terms of which employees identify with the organisation and its values, are involved in its activities and goals, and enjoy membership.

Affective commitment has generally been found to arise most strongly from the fit between situational and personal factors (Cohen, 1995; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990), as discussed below. Previously theorised and researched antecedents affecting the current study include autonomy (Dunham *et al*, 1994), role conflict and ambiguity (Mowday *et al*, 1982), satisfaction of expectations and basic needs (Meyer & Allen, 1997), organisational dependability (the extent to which employees feel the firm can be counted on to look after their interests, Dunham *et al*, 1994) and participation (Dunham *et al*, 1994; Mowday *et al*, 1982).

Given the above, although the moderating factors discussed later are expected to be very influential, it may be proposed that:

- Separation by the firm may be seen as lack of support, fostering of possible role conflict, and denial of a context in which employees may participate in their non-work roles or even be autonomous;

- Integration, while possibly addressing some employees' basic needs or expectations around non-work roles, may be seen as denying employees self-regulation in the management of their boundaries;

- Respect-type approaches may foster affective commitment best, given their ability to combine a view of organisational care and support with employee self-determination. The following is therefore proposed:

Proposition 1. Affective commitment will be a) positively related to respect-type responses by the firm, b) positively but less strongly related to integration responses, and c) negatively related to separation responses.

Affective commitment has been found to be positively related to outcomes such as productivity, retention, satisfaction and organisational citizenship behaviours, as well as individual well-being (see Meyer & Topolnytsky, 2000, for a review). It is therefore a potentially attractive variable.

3.2 Continuance commitment

Continuance commitment arises in cases where individuals feel that they are bound to the firm by the accumulation of side-bets (Becker, 1960), which refers to the accumulated consequences of membership in a specific firm that would be costly to lose if an employee were to leave and beneficial to keep by staying (Meyer & Allen, 1984). Seniority is a classic example.

Antecedents to continuance commitment are (a) the magnitude and number of investments or side-bets individuals make, and (b) a perceived lack of alternatives (Allen & Meyer, 1997). In the context of boundary management, if actions on the part of the firm create an environment that provides personal utility for the individual, and similar or better alternatives do not exist, then continuance commitment might arise (e.g. a parent choosing to remain because the child-care programme is better than that of other firms). Again moderators may be determinative. However, as continuance commitment relies on the creation of tangible side-bets rather than on the absence of something, and given that integration is the most tangible of the responses, with respect being less so, the following is suggested:

Proposition 2: Continuance commitment will be a) positively related to integration-type responses by the firm; b) positively but less strongly related to respect-type responses; and c) will bear no relation to separation responses.

Continuance commitment has been found to lead to retention, but also sometimes to negative on-the-job behaviours like performance, satisfaction

and OCBs (see review, Meyer & Topolnytsky, 2000). Such individuals may be committed for personal gain, but lack such qualities as the loyalty of affective commitment.

3.3 Normative commitment

Normative commitment involves perceptions of obligation to the organisation, such as an employee's feeling obliged to "pay back" training investments (Hackett *et al*, 1994). Some antecedents of normative commitment are theorised to include organisational socialisation (Allen & Meyer, 1990), co-workers' general organisational commitment and commitment behaviours, organisational dependability, and participatory management (Dunham *et al*, 1994).

Normative commitment would seem, by definition, to be a reciprocity-type response to a perception of some positive action, in this case perceived organisational support (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch & Rhoades, 2001). Similarly, reciprocity might be strongest where strong tangible action has been taken (integration) but less strong for respect. Separation may lead to feelings of violation of perceived obligations (or psychological contract terms involving non-work roles (Robinson, Kraatz & Rousseau, 1994), which may lead to a decrease in normative commitment. Therefore:

Proposition 3: Normative commitment will be a) positively related to a perception of integration-type responses by the organisation; b) positively but less related to respect-type responses; and c) negatively related to separation.

The above relationships are probably heavily influenced by moderating variables. Rothbard *et al* (2005: 246), for example, noted that *person-organisation fit* may be the key factor when looking for relationships between organisational responses and affective responses, in that the individual's response will depend on whether what is being offered by the firm "fits" with their particular preferences and/or specific needs regarding non-work roles. For instance, a non-parent may resent rather than embrace expensive onsite childcare. Although Rothbard *et al* (2005) focused on the personal factor "desire for segmentation", this study will rather investigate situational variables, which have at times been shown to account for more variance in commitment than personal characteristics (Cohen, 1995; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990).

4
Potential interactions with other constructs

Potential moderators to be assessed here include (a) the level of non-work involvement (b) the level of inter-role conflict (c) coping strategies adopted by the individual, (d) career commitment (Blau, 1985; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kirchmeyer, 1992; O'Driscoll, Ilgen & Hildreth, 1992; Rothbard *et al*, 2005). These are not exhaustive, but are the most commonly found moderators in many of the studies reviewed.

The first two factors are similar in that they may both increase the perceived need of the individual for positive organisational responses. In the language of stress theory, within a demands–resources interface the high non-work involvement and inter-role conflict may increase demands on individuals (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; O'Driscoll, Ilgen & Hildreth, 1992). Although expansion, in which personal resources rise to meet the need, should not be ruled out, the organisation's response might be seen as especially salient to the more affected individuals (Kirchmeyer, 1992), therefore:

Proposition 4: Non-work involvement may moderate any relationships between organisational boundary management and commitment so that the Propositions 1-3 relationships (either positive or negative) become stronger when non-work involvement increases.

Proposition 5: Inter-role conflict will have the same effect as non-work involvement.

Individual coping strategies are often proposed as moderators (Bakker & Geurts, 2004). Numerous typologies exist (Cooper, Dewe & O'Driscoll, 2001). Some (Carver, Scheier & Weintraub, 1989) include: (a) Active coping (trying to remove or circumvent the stressor, or

minimise its effects); (b) Planning (considering how to cope); (c) Suppression of competing activities (to allow greater concentration on the challenge); (d) Restraint (waiting for an appropriate opportunity to respond); (e) Seeking instrumental or emotional social support; (f) Focusing on and venting emotions (it is debatable whether emotion-focused coping is functional or not, and it may hinder growth, adaptation and active coping); (g) Behavioural or mental disengagement (behavioural disengagement involves helplessness and giving up, mental occurs when behavioural disengagement is constrained).

Kirchmeyer (1992) found that more positive coping aimed at altering personal attitudes and increasing personal efficacy rather than decreasing effort levels or depending on others appeared to be the most effective in helping managers cope with multiple domains (see also Cohen, 1995). The link to the propositions may be twofold. First, effectiveness in dealing with non-work domains may result in fewer work–non-work conflicts while also ameliorating negative attitudes to work (Cohen, 1995, although he did not find the proposed effect for commitment). Coping strategies would also seem related to the desire for segmentation, which Rothbard *et al* (2005) found to be a significant moderator, to such an extent that more positive, effective coping may be positively related to the desire for segmentation (the individual may be more empowered to help him/herself, and therefore value integration less, respect more, and not be overly concerned about segmentation). Support seekers likewise tend more to find support in their social networks and may require less organisational help. Suppression, restraint, emotional venting or disengagement coping may increase the need to depend on organisational support, thereby also increasing their valuation of active involvement. Therefore:

Proposition 6: Coping will affect the main relationships to the extent that a) Positive coping such as active coping and planning or social support seeking will weaken the relationships between organisational support for non-work domains and commitment; b) More negative coping types such as suppression, **restraint, emotional venting or disengagement will strengthen the relationships between organisational support for non-work domains and commitment.**

Finally, career commitment relates to the individual's interest and motivation to work in the particular profession or vocation, and is generally linked with more cosmopolitan views on careers (Blau, 1985). Individuals with a high "local" orientation are said to be extremely loyal to the organisation, and are likely to use an internal reference group, while a high "cosmopolitan" orientation implies lower levels of loyalty to the organisation and more use of external reference groups like professional associations. Those high in career commitment may not value internal managerial attempts to build organisational commitment as highly, therefore:

Proposition 7: The higher the level of career commitment, the weaker will be the relationships between organisational support for non-work domains and commitment.

4.1 Demographic variables

Various demographic factors might be amenable to explicit propositions. First, certain demographic factors may act to increase non-work involvement or role-conflict, and therefore act in the same way as propositions 4 and 5 above, or act to place employees within a particular life-cycle requirement profile (e.g. Moen *et al*, 2008). These may include marital status (those with partners may have higher commitment), dependants (current number and especially younger dependants, also future prospects of having children), age (older employees may have accumulated more non-work roles and family responsibilities) and possibly gender (Crouter, 1984; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The gender assumption is that, on average, females may have higher familial involvement; notwithstanding a shift in familial responsibilities on account of more gender equality in various family roles, there is little doubt that women are often still found to have higher than average involvement and more needs in this respect (Kirchmeyer, 1995). The above categories of employee

may experience greater needs for positive organisational responses, therefore:

Proposition 8: Employees who a) have partners; b) currently or expect to have dependent responsibilities; c) are mid-aged; d) are female; will experience heightened relationships in the main propositions, while the opposite demographics may have weaker relationships.

5
Method

The research study undertaken to test the above model required a causal, quantitative, survey-based research design.

5.1 Sample

Surveys were distributed to white-collar and professional employees working at companies represented in and networked to the management postgraduate class at the authors' university. The sample therefore entails non-probability convenience sampling. 150 questionnaires were distributed and 74 were returned completed, a 49.33 per cent response rate.

The sample had an average age of 34.8 years, 56.8 per cent were married and 37.8 per cent single; 24.3 per cent had dependants under the age of six and 19 per cent had dependants of school-going age; 47.3 per cent reported that they wished to have children in the future; 20.5 per cent of these wanted children within two years and 39.2 per cent within two to four years; 71 per cent were female; 22 per cent were black.

This sampling design therefore drew on a non-probability group, which limits generalisation. This is discussed later.

5.2 Instrument

Data were collected by means of self-administered surveys. The following variables were measured in terms of the model discussed above (all scales were measured using standard five-point Likert scoring unless otherwise indicated):

Organisational commitment. Allen and Meyer's (1991) three-dimensional scale was used, measuring affective, continuance and normative commitment via eight items each (α = .78, .73 and .71 respectively).

Organisational responses to non-work domains. Kirchmeyer's (1995) 10-item response scale was used, which measures the sub-dimensions of separation (α=.85), integration (α=.73) and respect (α=.82) on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "not typical of my organisation" to "very typical of my organisation".

Non-work involvement. Kanungo's (1982a) four-item job involvement scale was modified to yield non-work roles measure (e.g. "To me, my job is only a small part of who I am" α=.70).

Inter-role stress and conflict. Four of the six measures were taken from Frone *et al*'s (1992) scale measuring the extent to which work roles interfere with non-work roles and *vice versa*. Two items were added, to measure inter-role conflict and role overload. This scale (α=.84) was measured on a 4-point scale ranging from "not at all often" to "very often".

Career commitment. We employ four items from Blau's (1985) career commitment scale (α=.74).

Coping: Twenty-one items from the COPE scales (Carver *et al*, 1989), were used to measure coping types on a scale ranging from "I usually don't do this at all" to "I usually do this a lot" in response to stressful situations. Not all of the original items were used, so common factor analysis was used to check latent coping types. The factor analysis can be seen in Table 1. As shown in the table, four factors accounting for 60 per cent of the total variance were drawn. The first corresponded with the *support seeking and acceptance* coping discussed above (α = .87;), the second referred to individuals taking positive action and was accordingly labelled *effective coping* (α = .83). The third referred to neglect of other activities or the problem itself, and was therefore labelled *hindrance coping* (α = .65), and the fourth referred to *disengagement*, discussed above (α = .71).

Table 1

Principal component analysis of coping style items

Coping style items	Loadings
Effective coping	
I concentrate my efforts on doing something about it	.88
I try to come up with a strategy about what to do	.83
I take additional action to try and get rid of the problem	.76
I think hard about what steps to take	.64
Hindrance coping	
I restrain myself from doing anything too quickly	.66
I focus on dealing with the problem, and, if necessary, let other things slide a little	.61
I put aside other activities in order to concentrate on this	.58
I hold off doing anything until the situation permits	.58
I give up trying to achieve my goal	.51
Support seeking	
I talk to someone about how I feel	.86
I try to get emotional support from friends or relatives	.85
I talk to someone to find out more about the situation	.76
I look for something good in what is happening	.72
I try to grow as a person as a result of the experience	.69
I accept that this has happened and that it can't be changed	.63
I feel a lot of emotional distress and find myself expressing those feelings a lot	.62
I try to get advice from someone about what to do	.61
Disengagement	
I turn to work or other substitute activities to take my mind off things	.81
I reduce the amount of effort I'm putting into solving the problem	.67
I sleep more than usual	.67
I refuse to believe that this has happened	.59

Demographic variables. Demographics measured include age, marital status, race, gender, number of dependants (under six years of age, of school-going age and older), whether the respondent had future prospects of having children, and if so how many.

6
Results

Table 2 gives basic descriptive correlations and descriptive statistics. The bivariate correlations show various significant relationships. Affective and normative commitment are fairly highly correlated (r = .65, p < .01). Continuance commitment is correlated to a lesser extent with normative (r = .42, p < .01), but is seemingly not associated with affective commitment.

Regarding links between commitment and responses to non-work issues, affective commitment can be seen to be significantly positively associated with respect (r = .36, p < .01), but negatively with integration (r = –.39, p < .01) while it is seemingly not associated with separation. This provides some initial support for propositions 1a and 1c. The other types of commitment are only weakly associated with responses, with the possible exception of a positive association between respect and normative commitment (r = .22, p < .1). This could perhaps support proposition 3b.

Certain other associations are possibly worthy of mention. Career commitment is reasonably highly associated with affective commitment (r = .67, p < .01), and moderately with normative commitment (r = .37, p < .01) and respect (r = .30, p < .01). Hindrance and effective coping are moderately associated (r = .36, p < .01), while support seeking is positively associated with respect responses (r = .35, p < .01).

6.1 Organisational responses → organisational commitment

The researchers conducted an initial canonical correlation analysis to test for multivariate relationships between organisational response and commitment variates.

The testing of assumptions underlying canonical correlation indicated no serious deviations from normality, linearity or homo-scedasticity. However, a high correlation between affective and normative commitment of .63 and respect and separation at –.45 may particularly indicate cause for concern regarding multicollinearity. In the case of the independent organisational response dimensions, this could be tested via condition indices, tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) statistics in separate multiple regressions. These diagnostics did not indicate cause for concern (condition indices < 15, VIF < 1.4). Deletion tests for the dependent commitment variables are reported below.

Table 2

Correlations and descriptive statistics

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. Affective	31.77	5.97	(.81)																
2. Continuance	24.39	5.42	.15	(.73)															
3. Normative	23.19	4.68	.65†	.42†	(.71)														
4. Separation	5.19	1.95	-.39†	.17	-.17	(.85)													
5. Integration	7.64	3.13	.09	.10**	-.10	-.23**	(.73)												
6. Respect	9.59	3.47	.36†	.22	.22*	-.45†	.06	(.82)											
7. Conflict	13.44		-.08	-.14	-.14	.30**	.04	-.21*	(.84)										
8. NWI	14.86		-.28**	-.14	-.14	.07	-.08	-.10	.32†	(.70)									
9. Career	13.05		.67†	-.04	.37†	-.29**	.07	.30†	-.23**	-.29**	(.74)								
10. Effective coping	3.15	.59	-.13	.00	-.18	.23*	.15	-.11	.15	.09	.05	(.83)							
11. Hindrance coping	2.36	.83	-.04	.12	.03	.16	-.03	.09	.07	.12	-.18	.36†	(.65)						
12. Support seeking	2.91	.85	.19*	.05	.02	-.04	.07	.35†	-.20*	.07	.18	.21*	.20*	(.87)					
13. Disengagement	1.85	.84	.04	.17	.19*	.12	-.05	-.04	.03	-.06	-.12	-.16	.06	.08	(.71)				
14. Marital	–	–	.14	.14	.08	.03	.10	.10	-.03	-.14	.14	.03	-.04	.17	.16	–			
15. Age	34.8	–	.04	.16	.21*	-.06	-.37†	-.13	-.25**	-.12	.01	-.10	.09	-.21*	.04	-.36†	–		
16. Gender	–	–	.02	.21*	.10	.09	-.26**	-.00	.22*	.17	-.02	-.00	.05	.16	.30†	.09	-.05	–	
17. Dependants			.24**	.16	.21*	-.10	-.00	-.02	.03	.10	.06	-.04	.14	.08	-.16	-.28**	.12	-.20*	-.21*
18. Child prospects			-.08	-.18	-.18	.04	.25**	.00	.00	.09	.07	.11	-.07	.23	-.04	.27**	-.67†	-.14	-.10

† = p < 0.01; ** = p < 0.05; * = p < 0.1; ns = not significant

Canonical analyses were run using the summated scores for both support (independent) and commitment (dependent). The analysis, reported in Tables 3 and 4 resulted in the derivation of three canonical functions, the first accounting for 22 per cent of the variance in the commitment variate, the second 7 per cent and the third 3 per cent.

Table 3
Overall canonical correlation statistics

Canonical function	Canonical correlation	CR²	Redundancy index (RI)	
			Responses	**Commitment**
1	.47	.22†	.07	.11
2	.26	.07	.04	.02
3	.03	.00	.00	.00
Wilk's Lambda F(9, 165) = 2.62† Pillai's trace F(9, 210) = 2.51† Hotelling-Lawley trace F(9, 103) = 2.70† Roy's greatest root tests F(3, 70) = 6.75†				

† = p < 0.01; ** = p < 0.05; * = p < 0.1; ns = not significant

Table 3 suggests that only the first function might be statistically and practically significant (CR² = .22, p > 0.01). Multivariate tests of the canonical roots all indicated significance (Wilk's Lambda F(9) = 2.62, Pillai's trace F(9) = 2.51, Hotelling–Lawley's trace F(9) = 2.70 and Roy's greatest root tests F(3) = 6.75, all p > 0.01), suggesting that the first function should be interpreted. Redundancy analysis for the first function had shared variance of 0.50 in the independent variate, 0.34 in the dependent variate, and combination with the canonical root of 0.11 for the independent variate. This is not particularly high. However, on balance, the above suggests that the first variate should be assessed.

As shown in Table 4, the order of canonical weight contributions to the first variate from separation, respect and integration are –0.68, 0.39 and 0.24 respectively. Dependent variable orders for affective, continuance and normative commitment are 1.104, –0.31 and –0.22 respectively. Canonical loadings for separation, respect and integration were –0.91,

0.71 0.42 respectively, indicating that separation and respect are both representative of the independent variate, and integration slightly so. In the first dependent variate, affective, continuance and normative commitments have loadings of 0.91, –0.23 0.38 respectively. Cross-loadings indicated that separation correlated negatively with the first dependent variate, at –0.43 and respect at 0.34. Affective commitment also correlated reasonably with the first independent variate, at 0.43 (therefore, via squaring, 18.77 per cent of the variance in affective commitment was explained by the first function). Since the first function was predominantly represented by separation, and has a relatively high cross-loading with the first dependent variate, it can be strongly suggested that separation is negatively related to affective commitment. Respect does play a role in positively influencing affective commitment, though via a weaker relationship. These findings provide some support for propositions 1a and 1c.

Table 4
First canonical function statistics

	First canonical function		Cross loading with alternate variate
	Weight	Loading	
Independent variate			
Separation	−.68	−.91	−.43
Respect	.39	.71	.34
Integration	.24	.42	.20
Dependent variate			
Affective	1.104	.91	.43
Continuance	−.31	−.23	−.11
Normative	−.22	.38	.18

Given the possibility of multicollinearity between affective and normative commitment in this sample, as suggested by zero-order correlations, it was decided to test the effect of the removal of the normative commitment variable from the canonical correlation analysis. Virtually none of the major indices were significantly altered by this removal (results available upon request). This effect does suggest that normative commitment is probably collinear with affective.

The multivariate results reported above are now supplemented with multiple regression analysis, including moderation in terms of the stated propositions.

6.2 Organisational responses → affective commitment

Table 5 shows the main effects regression with affective commitment as the dependent variable. As seen there, the regression had acceptable fit $F(3, 70) = 5.78$, $p < 0.01$, $R^2 = 0.20$. Separation ($\beta = -0.29$, $p > 0.05$) and respect ($\beta = 0.23$, $p > 0.1$) were significant, again supporting 1a and c.

Also tested was a multiple regression analysis with continuance commitment as the dependent variable. However this model was found not to have acceptable fit ($F = .19$, $p > 0.1$), and, given the non-significance of continuance commitment in the canonical correlations, this line of inquiry was not pursued further.

Table 5
Firm responses on affective commitment

Source	F	SE	β	R^2
Separation	5.78 (3,70) [†]	.32	−.29[**]	.20
Respect		.18	.23	

[†] = p < 0.01; [**] = p < 0.05; [*] = p < 0.1; ns = not significant

In addition to main effects findings between organisational responses and employee commitment, various moderators were earlier posited to have potential effects. These propositions were tested next.

6.3 Moderation effects

Moderator effects were tested using variables found to be significant in the primary relationship, so separation and respect were each separately included as predictors, and affective as the response variable. The results are reported in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6
Moderation effects with separation on affective commitment

Moderator	Interaction with separation			
	F	β (moderator × separation)	β (main effect)	R²
Non-work involvement	F(3,70) = 8.37†	−.21*	−.22**	.26
Career commitment	F(3,70) = 23.84†	ns	.59†	.51
Interrole conflict	F(3,70) = 5.08†	ns	ns	.18
Effective coping	F(3,70) = 5.12†	ns	ns	.18
Hindrance coping	F(3,70) = 6.67†	−.26**	ns	.22
Support seeking	F(3,70) = 5.65†	ns	.18*	.19
Disengagement	F(3,70) = 4.66†	ns	ns	.17

† = p < 0.01; ** = p < 0.05; * = p < 0.1; ns = not significant

Table 7
Moderation effects with respect on affective commitment

Moderator	Interaction with respect			
	F	β (moderator × respect)	β (main effect)	R²
Non-work involvement	F(3,70) = 10.79†	0.36†	−.31†	.32
Career commitment	F(3,70) = 24.09†	−.16*	.59†	.51
Interrole conflict	F(3,70) = 5.39†	.24**	ns	.19
Effective coping	F(3,70) = 4.26†	ns	ns	.15
Hindrance coping	F(3,70) = 7.01†	.31†	ns	.23
Support seeking	F(3,70) = 3.81**	ns	ns	.14
Disengagement	F(3,70) = 3.62**	ns	ns	.13

† = p < 0.01; ** = p < 0.05; * = p < 0.1; ns = not significant

As seen in Tables 6 and 7, moderation tests were discovered to have the following effects.

1. *Non-work involvement*. The regressions had acceptable fit for interactions with both separation and respect (F = 8.37 and 10.79 respectively, both p < 0.01). The interaction term with separation was significant and negative (β = −.21, p < 0.1, R² = .26), indicating that, as involvement increases, separation leads to a more extreme decrease in affective commitment. This counteracts the expectation in proposition 4. The interaction term with respect was also significant (β = .36, p > 0.01, R² = 0.32), such that the positive relationship between respect and affective commitment strengthens as non-work involvement increases, supporting proposition 4.

2. *Career commitment*. Moderated multiple regressions testing interactions with sepa-

ration and respect respectively evidenced acceptable fit (F = 23.84 and 24.09, both p <0.01). Career commitment was found to be highly significant as a main effects contributor to the prediction of affective commitment (β = .59, p < .01, R^2 = 0.51), but not as a moderator. Career commitment did interact with respect (β = –.16, p < .1, R^2 = 0.51) such that higher career commitment weakened the positive relationship between respect and affective commitment. This suggests partial support for proposition 7.

3. *Inter-role conflict*: Regressions testing interaction with separation and respect evidenced acceptable fit (F = 5.08 & 5.39 respectively, both p <0.01). However, interaction with separation was not significant. Interaction with respect was significant (β = .24, p < 0.05, R^2 = 0.19), such that the positive relationship between respect and affective commitment strengthens with increased inter-role conflict, as suggested by proposition 5.

4. *Coping type 1: Effective coping*. Regressions testing interactions with separation and respect respectively evidenced acceptable fit (F = 5.12 and 4.26 respectively, both p < 0.01). However, parameter estimates for both interaction terms are not significant, so do not support proposition 6a.

5. *Coping style 2: Hindrance coping*. Regressions testing interactions with separation and respect respectively evidenced acceptable fit (F = 6.67 and 7.01 respectively, both p <0.01). Interactions were significant with both separation (β = –.26, p < 0.05, R^2 = 0.22) and respect (β = .31, p < 0.01, R^2 = 0.23), such that a negative relationship between separation and affective commitment strengthens with increased hindrance coping, as does a positive relationship between respect and affective commitment. This is precisely what proposition 6b predicts.

6. *Coping styles 3 and 4: Support seeking and Disengagement*. Regressions evidenced acceptable fit. However, no interactions were significant, so proposition 6a is not supported.

6.4 Demographic effects

Interactions with demographic controls were also tested. However, age, marital status, the number of dependants, future prospects of children, and gender did not have significant interaction effects, and therefore do not support proposition 8.

7
Discussion

The results suggest support for links between organisational responses to the non-work lives of its workforce and commensurate employee commitment. Specifically, it appears that the ever-popular and salient dimension of affective commitment can be affected, primarily as a result of a negative relationship with the separation response and a positive relationship with the respect response. Canonical correlation and OLS regression both fit these relationships. Hypothesis 1 is therefore largely supported, albeit not for the integration response of the firm.

The negative finding on separation suggests that firms that attempt to ignore the non-work lives of their employees do so at the risk of alienating them and potentially losing their loyalty (Kirchmeyer, 1995). As affective commitment has been shown to be strongly related to crucial workplace behaviours, including performance, turnover and absenteeism (Meyer & Topolnytsky, 2000), this is a potentially important effect. Organisations ignoring non-work dimensions may risk real losses in productivity, presumably from disenchanted employees who might feel that their non-work lives are linked too inextricably to their productivity to be completely ignored.

The positive alternative to separation in this study was respect, an attitude that affords employees the ability to create their own solutions to work-life conflicts. This attitude, which is largely composed of flexibility and tolerance on the part of the firm, results in increased affective commitment in the overall sample.

The integration alternative, involving active involvement of the company in the employee's

private life and boundary permeability, while not denuding commitment, also did not increase in the way that respect did. This is the same as Kirchmeyer's finding (1995), and may indicate that a paternalistic approach to non-work domains, in which the firm crosses the threshold into the employee's private domain, is not as effective in facilitating affective commitment as an approach of respect and tolerance. Rothbard *et al*'s finding (2005) that fit between the individual's need and organisational boundary management was salient is not precluded by these findings: respect offers the greatest possibility for employee-initiated fit (Desrochers & Sargent, 2004).

These findings suggest that employees do wish to be given the opportunity and 'space' to manage their own role conflict, and respond with gratitude, but there is a limit. This possibly points to the importance to corporate values of empowerment through participation and autonomy and trust, rather than control. Integration is possibly too much of a one-size-fits-all response, in which blanket assumptions are (sometimes wrongly) made about the effect of non-work issues.

It may seem strange that affective rather than normative commitment is augmented by the respect response, given that the latter involves a perceived obligation to the firm stemming from concession to or investments made in the employee. It would seem that employees see the firm's response to their non-work lives as a right, not a privilege or favour, a social norm that does seem to be growing (e.g. Payne & Wayland, 1999).

The findings may moreover provide support for the expansion model of personal resources (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Rothbard, 2001), in that employees' preference for respect-type responses may indicate their willingness to respond with positive coping. Rothbard *et al* (2005) came to similar conclusions in the case of non-work stress and person–job fit respectively.

The lack of effect on continuance commitment suggests that the side-bet theory of investments (Becker, 1960) does not necessarily apply to non-work lives. Proposition 2 is based principally on the notion that an organisation's integration or respect approach could be seen as an investment in the employee, which would heighten continuance commitment (via the creation of a perception that the individual may struggle to find such support elsewhere). As discussed above, continuance commitment does not always amount to a positive outcome, so this finding is not necessarily a loss for the firm.

Moderation propositions were partially supported in this study:

1. The negative relationship between the separation response and affective commitment was strengthened: 1) the more the employee was involved in non-work domains, or; 2) the more the employee resorted to hindrance as a coping mechanism.

2. The positive relationship between respect and affective commitment was stronger for: 1) employees more involved in non-work domains (in fact, employees low in non-work involvement actually evidenced a small negative relationship); 2) employees with *lower* career commitment; 3) employees with higher inter-role conflict; 4) employees who resorted to hindrance as a coping mechanism.

The first two findings seem straightforward: employees with high involvement and conflict are more likely to experience work-life pressures on their productivity, personal lives and even health, and therefore have a greater stake in the firm's response. They are therefore more likely to be disenchanted by separation but aided and impressed by respect, and are less likely to have the "desire for segregation" (Rothbard *et al*, 2005). The present researchers' finding that individuals with low non-work involvement actually evidenced a small *decrease* in affective commitment from increased respect is consistent with an underlying possibility of segregation desire. Rothbard *et al* (2005) similarly found that high desire for segmentation decreased commitment when firm policies were more in evidence. Thus organisational concessions to groups such as parents may alienate employees who are not part of these groups. They may feel that they are subsidising the non-work needs of colleagues (e.g. if a flexibility policy aiding parents results in single employees being asked

to fill in for such colleagues at inconvenient times).

The findings for hindrance coping partially confirm proposition 6b. Hindrance-coping implies ignoring other areas or the problem itself when stressed, implying a possible external locus of control. Essentially, such individuals are more likely to ignore their non-work domains if stressed at work and *vice versa*, and are also more likely to react to external circumstances. Such employees may need more help and are more likely to suffer from being left alone. It stands to reason, therefore, that an organisation's separation response would lead to lower affective commitment: such individuals would potentially be stressed and unable to cope more effectively, so facilitation of their non-work lives would be more acceptable.

Employees committed to their careers were less likely to become affectively committed on account of their firm's respect response. This partially confirms proposition 7. Such individuals see their careers as vocations rather than a means to an end, sometimes seeing themselves as members of a broader body, generally of professionals. Attribution of salience to the career suggests less reliance on the organisation for non-work benefits and therefore less reaction to internal policies. However, career commitment in this study was exceptionally *positively* related to affective commitment in the main effect ($\beta = 0.59$, $p < 0.01$). Highly career-committed individuals may still see the firm as the means of playing out a vocation, becoming committed for that reason, but they are still less likely to view the firm as a means of fulfilment in their extrinsic needs. Such individuals, by dint of their commitment to their careers, may also by nature be less involved in non-work roles and consequently experience less role conflict (a possibility borne out by negative zero-order correlations).

7.1 Limitations

The research has various limitations. The sample size is small, of a non-probability nature, and largely corporate, to some extent limiting possibilities for generalisation. However, it may be easier to generalise between managerial rather than non-managerial groups owing to the standardisation and internationalisation of work, networking and training in managerial work. The research focused specifically on commitment, which is a limited, albeit powerful, expression of workplace outcome variables. The survey further focused on employee perceptions of company policies, rather than on actual support or actions by immediate colleagues or supervisors, which may be idiosyncratic.

7.2 Research recommendations

Recommendations for research largely concern missing variables. Path analysis, including behavioural variables such as performance, turnover or absenteeism as outcomes of commitment may be effective. Variables distinguishing firm policies from supervisory or co-worker support could be helpful (e.g. Eisenberger *et al*, 2001). Moderation via variables such as individual personality, group support or cohesion, tenure, firm size, perceived firm resources for support, and previous experiences of employees may add to the model. Inclusion of employee expectations of or desire for segmentation (e.g. Rothbard *et al*, 2005) would help clarify the role of person–organisation fit. As far as the sample is concerned, extension to the small to medium firm size would add to understanding of different employment sectors.

8
Conclusion

The involvement of organisations in the broader fabric of society has become a particularly debated topic. A strong lobby maintains that firms can and should be directly involved in the non-work lives of their staff, for functional, productivity-related reasons, as a principal stakeholder, or for fundamental ethical reasons. This study suggests support for some role for employers, but a constrained one. It is worth remembering, in the hubbub of the ethical debate, that autonomous and empowered employees may have their own say in how much involvement they want. This study suggests that employees may vote with their feet and hearts:

firms can win affection by respecting, tolerating and facilitating the work–life interface, but should perhaps steer clear of being too actively paternalistic. In creating flexibility and respect, they may indeed enhance productivity.

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